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The Victory of Cupid

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CAST OF CHARACTERS.

1. Cupid.
2. Sestus.
3. Jupiter.
4. Sad Satyr.
5. First
6. Second
7. Third
8. Hermes.

Satyrs.

1. Versanta.
2. A Dryad.
3. Juno.
4. Proserpina.
5. Venus.
6. First
7. Second
8. Third

Dryads.

NOTE

This play is founded on the Greek myth that a Dryad's kiss will make a person ten years younger. This supposition that Cupid's kiss will heal all wounds of love, however, is based on no authority; so the kindly reader will doubtless permit the author the liberty of inventing it.

THE VICTORY OF CUPID

ACT I

SCENE 1. *The forest.*

(*Enter Dryads and Satyrs dancing and singing.*)

Proserpina, hail! her we praise,
In reverence a hymn we raise.
Let all the flowers rise to greet her,
And with songs come let us meet her,
See! she steps from Hades' shades
To smile and grace our summer glades,
To make the days grow long and still,
And evenings cool with slumber fill.
Proserpina, hail! her we praise,
In reverence a hymn we raise.

(*Enter a Sad Satyr.*)

First Dryad.
Hush, comrades, I pray you, who wanders here?

First Satyr.
It is my sad brother, half mortal I fear.

First Dryad.
He wanders forsaken and lonely indeed.

First Satyr.
Of a good frolic he's sadly in need.

Dryad.
Come, let us beg him to dance in the wood.

Satyr.
Oh, frolic with us as true Satyrs should!

Sad Satyr.
Away with you! oh, idle heartless things,
Who dance on feet, as if you dance on wings,
Can you not leave mè here to muse alone;
As idle once as you, but wiser grown?

First Satyr.
He seems to have no wish with us to play!

First Dryad.
Ah, lose your wisdom, come with us I pray!

Sad Satyr.
I come with no one, here it is I stay!
I will have none of you, begone, away!

(*As they go out.*)

First Satyr.
If this be wisdom, I am happier fool.

First Dryad.
Ha, ha, we study in a merrier school!

(*Exeunt dancing and laughing.*)

(*Sad Satyr seats himself on a log holding his head in his hands.*)

(*Enter Cupid from right.*)

Cupid.

Ha! ha! well as I live, good friend, so it is you;
As mournful as Achilles when he Hector slew!
Come friend, from Olympus much news I bring.
For sweetly now my golden arrows sing.
Great Zeus, ha! ha! he always kept me working,
When Jove's in love fair Cupid is not shirking!
Sweet Io is the beauteous maiden's name,
Come friend, be merry, I only am to blame.

Sad Satyr.

Ah, yes, you only, yet you are not sad.
To see your brother's grieving makes you glad.

Cupid.

Ha, ha, friend Satyr, tell me why you weep?

Sad Satyr.

Oh, Cupid! you can rob me of my sleep,
Torment me waking till I long to die,
And laugh afresh at every longing cry,
Then with smooth words wherein disguised lies
The cruelest mocking of my Dryad's eyes,
With these smooth words pretend to sooth my pain
And prick me with a hidden spear again,
Then at your fiendish wit laugh free and loud;—
Though you be great the thunder cloud
Of Immortal Zeus is greater still.
Sir, I am gone Great Jove on you to tell;
Complaints and accusations so on you to heap
That Jove with kindliest smile shall ask me why I weep.

Cupid (*anxiously*).

No, no, my friend, not, not to Zeus today.

Satyr (*shaking him off*).
Leave me alone; I will do as I say!

Cupid.
But Zeus is busy making love to Io——

Satyr.
And if there be one more 'twill make a trio.

Cupid.
By what means may I your friendship gain?

Satyr.
By none unless you ease me of my pain!

Cupid.
That will I do. (*Kisses him.*)

Satyr.
And one condition more?

Cupid.
I have agreed.

Satyr.
That you will cease awhile
To torment all immortals, even Zeus,
And do you yourself confine to tormenting
Mortals alone; are you contented?

Cupid.
Yes.
I say I have agreed.

Satyr.
'Tis well, for lo! here comes the fair Versanta.

Cupid.
I know the maid, much have I done to her.

Satyr (*laughing*).
And as I live, here likewise comes old Sestus.

(*Enter Versanta from left.*)

Be mindful of your promise unto me,
Shoot fair Versanta with a leaden arrow
And youthful Sestus with a golden one. (*Laughs.*)

Versanta.
Oh, woods, defend me from the uncouth gaze
Of suitors hateful to my tired sight!
Oh, Venus! and thy soft-eyed son,
Have mercy on a maid in misery
Whom thou hast granted a fair face and form.

Cupid.
Nay, I cannot shoot, she begs for mercy.

Satyr.
And will you break your promise unto me?
Ha, ha, who is the greater we shall see!

Cupid.
Oh, stop! I have agreed and I must shoot.

Satyr.
Ay, that you must, I have already said so.

Cupid (*taking an arrow*).
Alas, oh, most hapless Versanta, fiem video,
I see your finish. (*Shoots her.*)

Satyr.
Now, prithee, shoot old Sestus!

Cupid.
Antem video, I see your finish, too.
(*They slip behind a tree.*)

Sestus.
Ye gods! what nymph across my path does stray?
Oh, beauteous maiden, whither do you go?
From Venus you obtained those eyes of gray,
Those lips which curve so like her Cupid's bow.
Oh, hearken not to broiling youths, mine own,
Who fight and die about fair maidens' smiles;
But turn to one who now is wiser grown,
Whilst he with kisses soft the time beguiles.

Versanta.
Oh, oh, what aged ape before me kneels
And pricks my ears with his unearthly squeals?
Oh! what a glorious suitor you do make;
Why, sir, I've laughed until my sides do ache!

Sestus.
Oh, best beloved, mock me not, I pray,
Dearest Versanta, do not run away,
How could I all these years thy beauty see,
And not surrender heart and soul to thee?

Versanta.
Your rhyming does you credit, I am sure,
But pray you seek another to allure
By your unearthly words and voice most pure.
Begone! begone! you hideous old man,
I run as fast as Atlanta ran. (*Starts to go.*)

Sestus.

Oh, best beloved, most adored one,
Come, listen, there is more, I've but begun,
Stay, stay, mine own and you shall hear
Sweet words composed to her I hold so dear!
Stay but one moment, hear but one more word
To run away, my dear, is quite absurd!

Versanta.

Were you but half as deaf as you now are
You would not blame my running fast and far.

(*Exit Versanta. Left.*)

Sestus.

Did ever shepherd meet so sad a fate;
Did ever mortal mourn as Sestus does;
Did ever maiden speak more cruel words
And in so doing, look more beautiful?
Oh, purple plumed Pluto, take me now
Unto thy regions dark, of endless night,
For what is left here but bitter woe,
As homeward to my lonely hut I go?

(*Sits down on log mournfully.*)

Satyr.

Oh, what a joke; I'm going to tell the fellows.

(*Exit Satyr. Right.*)

Cupid (*angrily*).

Oh, worthless rascal, whom I pitied once,
Foul emblem of the selfishness of man!
Yes, once upon that very log you wept

And cried for mercy like an orphan babe!
Though you forget, your doom is sealed by Jove
And by the mighty god, immortal love!

(*Exit Cupid. Left.*)

Dryad (*tapping on her tree*).
Let me out, let me out.

Sestus.
Did some one speak to me?

Dryad.
Let me out, let me out, whoever you may be.

Sestus.
It is a dryad locked in this oak tree!

(*Turns the key and lets her out.*)

Dryad.
My faithful friend, old Sestus! why in tears?
Do Satyrs mock you by their uncouth jeers?

Sestus.
Ah, no! no Satyrs mock old Sestus now,
No green-clad fluttering Dryads laugh at him,
No leaf decked Oreads or slender nymphs
Do mockingly hold out their hands to him
And offer fruits they never think to give;
But worse than all these things, oh, Dryad sweet,
Before Versanta's dainty feet I knelt,
And, Dryad, she called me an "aged ape"!

Dryad.

Alas, oh, faithful one, is this thy fate,
To love a maiden when it is too late?
With all the ardor of an unloved youth
To kneel before her and confess the truth?
Ah me, the woes of mortals harshly grate
On us created for a happier fate!
Created here in harmony to dwell,
Never to soft-voiced woods to breathe farewell;
Yet with misfortune I can sympathize,
I think I was a mortal once and wise.
It was an aged ape that she called thee?

(*Sestus nods.*)

An aged ape thou shalt no longer be!

(*Kisses him seven times and leads him to a fountain.*)

Behold thyself of two and twenty years!
Wouldst for Versanta now weep bitter tears?

Sestus.

Dryad, upon the grass before thee
This re-born shepherd bends his knee,
Ivy-twined Dryad, I kiss thy feet,
As for the grateful, it is meet.
Ill can my mortal tongue thy mercies thank;
But, Dryad, let me kiss thy garments dank
In token of my great good will to thee.
Green-sandaled Dryad, from thine own oak tree
Each new-born spring, I'll come, my friend, to free.
Now to be glad I lack but one thing more.
Dryad, I thank who never thanked before.

Dryad.

Shepherd, thy grateful thanks I gladly take.

(*Pauses, then takes a garland of ivy from her neck and puts it about Sestus' neck.*)

Keep it and wear it for a Dryad's sake!

(*Exit to the left.*)

Sestus.

Oh, generous hearted Dryad, that she is,
I feared she'd take my freedom quite away;
Pale was her face, and tremulous her hand
From a wound unhealed as yet by Cupid's kiss.
She made me fair, she loved, and left me free.
Oh, Dryad, thanks again I give to thee,
Who left me free to serve Versanta's eyes
By her own pain and great self-sacrifice.
But fair Versanta mayest thou soon be mine,
Already I, my heart, my all, are thine!

(*Exit Sestus to the right.*)

ACT 1. SCENE 2. *Another part of the forest.*

(*Enter Cupid from the left, walking slowly and thoughtfully to the other side of the stage.*)

(*Enter Dryad running.*)

Dryad (*touching Cupid*).

Ah, Cupid, I have found you here at last!

Cupid.
Dryad, what ails you that you come so fast?

Dryad.
The woes of mortals, Cupid, send me here,
And they pursue me still, until I come
Into the presence of almighty love,
Oh, Cupid, you will help them for you can.
One lover loves, the other spurns his suit.

Cupid.
Dryad, you grieve me sorely for a vow
Withholds me from committing what you ask.

Dryad.
A vow! It is a vow made out of fear
For thine own circumstances. Cupid, hear.
Wilt thou not break it for a righteous cause?
Break it with love, that selfishness has made;
For when two evils closely coincide
The lesser evil is turned into good.

Cupid.
Dryad, I thank you for this reasoning,
So "when two evils closely coincide
The lesser evil is turned into good"?
I thank you, Dryad. If I break the vow
The consequences fall on me alone,
Therefore it surely is the lesser evil,
So I will break it, Dryad; what can be
More easy than the right when it is our own will?

Dryad.
Cupid, I cannot thank thee well enough!

Cupid.

But, Dryad, in your eyes are two large tears.
And now they rise and fall upon your cheek;
Oh, Dryad, do you love this Sestus?

Dryad (proudly).

Cupid, away, it is not fitting you
Should gaze upon the symptoms of my grief!

Cupid.

Dryad, behold! I go to do your bidding.
I will prick onward all Versanta's beaux
And she will flee into the woods again,
I will take Sestus gently by the hand,
And lead him to the spot where we now stand!

(Exit to right.)

Dryad.

Now that my Sestus soon shall be made glad,
I too shall dance and clap my hands for joy.

(Gay music begins and she starts to dance, music gradually becomes sad. She stops.)

But no,—it is that selfishness again,
And something holds me down, I cannot dance.

(Re-enter Cupid leading Sestus from left.)

Sestus.

Oh, I have sought her everywhere,
In village, forest, far and near,
But something leads me on that here
I shall find my fair Versanta.

But what it is I cannot know,
It only says (Cupid in his ear) : Go, Sestus, go,
You may go fast, you may go slow,
But you shall find Versanta.

(*Enter Versanta from right.*)

Versanta.
Oh, weary feet of mine, will you forsake me now!
Oh, Goddess Artemis! but, no! alas!
She cradles fair Endymion in her arms
And will not hear a helpless maiden's cry.
I am alone helpless and miserable!
Chased to the woods by clownish lovers' vows
And back again by yet more hateful ones
And to the woods again by all combined,
And all because I am so beautiful.
Oh, I wish I were as old and chasmed
As these rocks which arch above the wood,
And in whose shaggy bosom I will now
Seek out some cheerless refuge for myself.

(*Turns to the left and sees Sestus.*) (*Cupid shoots her with a golden arrow.*)

Versanta (*in surprise*).
But who is this comes dropping from the sky,
What is your name, oh, fair-haired passer-by?

Sestus.
My name is Sestus, shepherding my occupation.

Versanta.
There dwells an ancient shepherd in our village
Of that same name who greatly dotes on me.

Sestus.
And he is here, Versanta—I am he!

Versanta (*laughing.*)
Oh, indeed, you are as witty as you are beautiful!

Sad Satyr.
Why, boys, this goes too smoothly to suit me,
How did old Sestus make himself so young?

First Satyr.
And Cupid's vow lies broken at his feet—

Second Satyr.
You promised us a joke, but I see none.

Sad Satyr.
Cheer up, my fellows, we shall yet have fun!

(*Exeunt Satyrs to left and re-enter with Dryads.*)

Sad Satyr.
Tall, blue-eyed, fair-haired—wonderful!

First Satyr.
The most adorable boy you ever saw.

First Dryad.
Oh, here he is, girls!

Second Dryad.
How darling.

(*They fall upon his neck and try to kiss him.*)

Versanta (*trying to tear them away*).

Leave him alone! I tell you he is mine!
You horrid little creatures! stop, I say!
Oh, how like snakes their slender arms entwine!

(*They kiss him twice and he is two years old.*)

And now they've kissed my Sestus all away!

(*The infant Sestus wails and holds his arms to her, but she flees in terror; the Satyrs and Dryads mock the child. Enter Cupid in rage.*)

Cupid.

Oh, cruel heartlessness and treachery!
Who taught you, Satyrs, to torment men so?
Who told you Dryads to forsake your trees
And make this blot upon your memories?
Better in ice sealed caves to dwell a year,
And you in rotting branches slumbering lie
For one whole year, than for years to come
To find these places your barred prison house!
For I forbid you freedom in these woods
Until this baby shall be grown a man!

(*Satyrs and Dryads weep loudly.*)

Dryad.

For my sake, Cupid, take a part away
Of this great punishment; forgive my friends,
They did this wrong as thoughtlessly as butterflies
That idly sip the honeysuckle's treasure.

Cupid (*more calmly*).

For your sake, Dryad, it shall be
Until ten years have passed away.
Go creatures of a day, free heartless things.
Hie to your homes and think about your sins!

(*Exeunt to the left.*)

Cupid (*to the Dryad*).

Dryad, my mind misgives me and my heart
Heavy with harvesting of others' woes
Is full of apprehension and dismay!
Our woes are but the shades of greater ones;
Just as upon a dull and cloudy day,
When o'er our heads the bending clouds make moan,
Our hearts are instantaneously made sad.
Those are the clouds that cause our discontent
And those are caused by battles of the gods!
Trust me, sweet Dryad; Juno in her heart
Stores up black jealousy and grim revenge
To overwhelm her mighty lord, whom I
Have pierced with singing arrows, keen and swift,
Alas, what shall I do with this sad child?
Where shall I leave him in this forest wild?
What harbor is there for his helpless head?

Dryad.

Cupid, entrust this weeping child to me
And I will care for him and bring him up,
Not as a sad and long faced mortal child,
But as a blithe barefooted Satyr,
With curling hair and garments made of furs.
And thus he may forget the fair cause of his grief.

Cupid.

Beware lest in affection for this child
You steal that kiss that keeps his tiny life,
And blow him with your breath away like dust.
From this time onward, sweet and noble creature,
You are the only Dryad free to roam,
Mingling your high voice with the evening sounds,
Aiding the chase and hindering the swift hounds;
And ever, Dryad, is my heart with thee.
Remember Cupid, oh, remember me!

(*Curtain.*)

ACT I

SCENE 3, same as Scene 2. *Midnight.*

(*Enter Versanta from right, walking as if in fear.*)

Versanta.
Sestus, oh, Sestus! love 'tis I who call.
We, creatures of the air,
Perhaps he is asleep, where can he be?
Hark,—only darkness, silence and the night.

Owl.
Whoot! whoot! whoot! who! who! whooo!

Versanta.
It is the owl, the pilot of the night,
The eye that watches when the moon is hid.
His voice is awful, ominous and boding,
Is it of Sestus' death that he is moaning?

Owl.
Whoot! whoot! whoot! who! who! whooo!

Versanta.
Again he shrieks, and now he spreads his wings,
Ah, gone, quite gone, I will take hope again.

(*She hunts about on the ground.*)

Here is his tiny footprint in the sand,
And here, oh, here, his garment in my hand:
But where is Sestus, oh, where does he stay?
Oh, wicked Dryads, ye have kissed him all away!

(*Rushes to the trees and beats her hands against them. Dryads sing to sad lamentable music.*)

Bound by our own hard hearts,
Mourning our vanished arts,
We creatures of the air
Vainly our chains we tear,
Vainly we sway our bodies to and fro,
In vain, ah, all in vain we sob with woe.

(*Versanta sinks down sobbing.*)

The god of love has bound us fast,
Till full ten years be past,
Never more the sun to see,
Never more our limbs to free,
Vainly to sway our bodies to and fro,
In vain, ah, all in vain to sob with woe.

Versanta (*rising*).
But my ear hears nothing but the moaning pines,
And my heart hears nothing but a deep lament.
So he is gone, ah, gone, who was so fair,
And all the bending tree tops mourn for him.
Why do I linger then to mourn him too?
Why do I hesitate to end my life,
Pouring it out with bitterness of tears?

(*Picking berries.*)

Flower of darkness, blown in Pluto's cave,
Sweetest of Hades' flowers, thy purple juice I crave.
Deadlier than deadly vipers, deadly nightshade,
Pluck and break my brittle stem e'er it droop and fade!
But now I was happy, happier than light,
But the light of my heart is out, take then my sight.
But now I was happy, happier than love,
But the flame of my life is spent, take me, Stygian Jove!

(*She eats the berries, falls drowsily back.*)

How sweet the poisonous wine of Hades is!
How cooling is the kindly hand of death,
How soothing is the voice that leads me on!
How dull a thing is pain!

(*Rising again.*)

Sing! crickets, sing! sing to me while I die!
Sing to me, morning light, and birds that by me fly,
Sing, happy heart, released from your dark door,
Sing, spirit, sing, Versanta is no more!
Oh, no more, no more (*falling back*)
Sing,——no more.

(*Chorus of crickets.*)

(*Curtain.*)

ACT II

SCENE 1. *In the forest, ten years later.*

(*Enter Cupid from right, flying.*)

Cupid.

From high Olympus swooped on outspread wings,
Cleaving the air that past my cool ears sings,
I come again to visit this sad earth.
I come to free you, Dryads, from your trees,
You wicked, thoughtless creatures of the breeze.

(*Unlocks one tree.*)

First Dryad (*stepping out*).

Oh, dazzling sun, oh, happy dancing leaves!
I have not seen you for full many years,
I have almost equaled with my tears
The leaves that fell when I was close mewed up.
But now how fair, how blooming is the world!
Indeed I never was so glad before!

(*He unlocks the next tree.*)

Second Dryad (*stepping out*).

Is it of liberty you whisper, sister?
My ears are dulled with never hearing words.
Is it in freedom that you wave your arms?
Mine are so tightly bound with clinging vines
That I can scarcely lift them from my sides!

(*He unlocks the next tree.*)

Third Dryad (*stepping out*).

Look where the sun has left his morning marks,
And has begun to climb the noonday sky,
Smell how the air, which once was fresh with dew,
Is scorched by furious Phoebus' parching rays.
The flowers wither in their scanty shade,
I had begun to fear you would not come!

(*He unlocks the rest of the trees, Dryads join hands and exeunt to right.*)

Cupid (*watching them*).

Gone, gone, swift pretty creatures of the air,
And not a word of thanks they give to me!
What do I need it? No, I put them there! (*laughs*)
But now I must away, away,
With my sweet Dryad in the woods to play.
Swift as my arrows, leaving winds behind,
My fairy of the woods I soon shall find!

(*Exit to the left.*)

ACT II. Scene 2. *Another part of the forest.*

(*Enter Dryad.*)

Dryad.

This is the day when Cupid comes to earth
To free the Dryads from their close locked limbs;
For ten whole years ago, upon this day,
Versanta died and all the Dryads wept,
Shed their green leaves upon her in the spring.
This is a fated day; a day on which
The slender scales that do sustain our fortune

Hang doubtful, shall they turn this way or that?
A day on which one feeble breath may change
The mighty future that shall shape our lives.
This is a fated day, I feel the air,
I feel the feeling of uncertainty
That hangs so close about my heavy heart.
This is a fated day, and that was one on which Versanta died.

(*Enter Cupid, flying.*)

Cupid.
Dryad, to earth I have returned once more.
I have fulfilled my duty to the Dryads,
And now the length of this remaining day
Here in the woods I'll spend with you in play.

Dryad.
Rather in weeping—I have much to say.

Cupid.
Oh, whom, Versanta? Is it good or evil?

Dryad.
Oh, it is ill, my Cupid, very ill!
Versanta, that rash maiden, is no more.

Cupid.
What, dead!—Oh, this has found me unprepared.

Dryad.
Yes, she is dead, she died ten years ago,
She died at her own hand that fated day.

Cupid.
Oh, you have stabbed me with this bitter word.
Versanta dead, dead, and the fault is mine. (*Weeps.*)

Dryad.
Dead, Cupid, dead, the fault though is not thine.
We cannot force the hard fates to be kind.

Cupid.
Indeed, oh, Dryad, I should comfort you,
Instead, 'tis you that has to comfort me,
But wait a little,—I am stronger now.

Dryad.
I shall need comfort soon, for there is more.

Cupid.
Is Sestus dead? Speak on, I am prepared.

Dryad.
He is not dead, he would be happier so,
For night and day he mourns for his lost love.
Seeking through tall trees, whispering her name,
He weaves for her fresh garlands every day.
In vain I strive to teach him how to play.
He will not dress as other children do
But in white robes with sleeves that reach his knee,
And tears hang ever on his lashes long,
Bathing his pallid cheeks with bitter dew,
His mouth is ever drooping like a bended bow,
His voice is as the moaning nightingale. (*Weeps.*)

Cupid.
Oh, I beseech you, weep no more for him.
Sweet Dryad, trust me, I shall make all well.

Dryad.
Cupid, you cannot; do you think you can?

Cupid.
I will not see those tears upon your eyes!
Ay, as fair Phoebus drinks the morning dew,
So will I dry your tears, oh, Dryad, mine!

(*He kisses her.*)

Dryad (*reproachfully*).
Is this a time for making love, rash boy?
Yet with your kiss you healed my throbbing heart,
And now instead of Sestus, I love—you.
Oh, this is worse and worse, where will your deeds
Bring you to, reckless boy!

Cupid.
Worse and less worse,—and if you love me, Dryad,
Give me that kiss that I did give to you!

Dryad.
Not till my Sestus smiles. Go, Cupid, go,
Go and repair the grief that you have caused me.

(*Exit to left.*)

(*Enter Dryads from right dragging Sestus after them. Sestus is struggling to get away.*)

First Dryad (*laughing*).
Come, pretty boy, with us and play.

Second Dryad.
Wreath us with garlands instead today.

Third Dryad.
Give us your red lips to deck it with.

First Dryad.
Give us your red lips to deck it with.

Second Dryad.
Give us your bright eyes for stars in our hair.

Third Dryad.
Give us a kiss for our compliments.

Sestus.
No, cruel girls, you shall not kiss me now.
Leave me alone! Indeed I love you not!
Run, Dryads, run, for I have here a sling,
And I will shoot you if you leave me not!

First Dryad.
Why what a naughty temper he is in!

Second Dryad.
This cannot be the pretty boy we saw.

Third Dryad.
Oh, do not frown, dear, it becomes you not.

First Dryad.
Come, girls, away, the sloping sun grows hot,
Come, come away to bathe in fountains cool!
Come, come away; we leave you, most sweet fool!

(*Exeunt to left.*)

Sestus (*turning to a large tree at his right*).
Beneath this oak tree I last dreamt of her,
Reclining here upon the feathered grass,
I heard her soft voice in my lovesick ears,
And saw the sad smile on Versanta's face,
And when I stretched my hungry arms to her
She smiled herself away, and then I woke—
But now no dreams hang on my open lids,
No slumber can refresh my aching heart,
No waters cool can quench my burning bosom.
Versanta is dead, I heard the Dryad say it,
I heard her tell to Cupid of her death.

(*Flings himself on the ground beneath the tree, sobbing.*)

Cupid.
Sweet child, have courage, hope a little more.

Sestus.
Hope! Oh, no hope when death has closed her eyes.
Oh, Dryad, dear, how long have you deceived me?
When did she die, you never told me of it?

(*He turns and sees Cupid. Kneels before him.*)

Oh,—Cupid, great god of love!

Cupid.
When Cupid bends from heaven to comfort you,
Then courage have, young Sestus, pray your prayer.

Sestus.
I never knew a mother's dear embrace,
I never knew a home or parent's face,

I never knew a child's sport nor a smile,
I never laughed. I wept a mournful while.
Only Versanta have I ever known.
She's all I had and now she's taken from me,
Cupid, have mercy, bring her back to me!
Great god of love, have mercy on my grief!

Cupid.

Oh, cease, unnatural child, you have obtained your plea!—
His strange words have a strange effect on me.
He is not mortal, oh, what shall I do?
He burns my conscience with his flaming eyes.
How shall I make amends, oh, how? oh, how?

(*Turns his face away. Continues in a different tone.*)

Straight to black bearded Pluto I'll away,
I will pursue him with my mournful plea,
Until he shall release the fair Versanta
From his dark caverned clutches for this boy.
Courage, boy, courage, ten years from today
You shall behold Versanta on this earth;
For Cupid gives his promise, and when he
Does bind himself by oath it is secure,
For he will run through fire, swim through molten lead,
Before he break his vow; but come, away,
And Cupid's feet no obstacle shall stay.
Never will I my mission high forsake
Till with one deed four lovers two I make!

(*Exit Cupid flying, to right, Sestus still adoring at the left.*)

(*Curtain.*)

ACT III

SCENE 1. *At Olympus. Jupiter and Juno enthroned.*

Cupid seated sulkily at right of the throne. Venus at the left of throne.

Venus (*coming to Cupid*).
My son, what angry tears thine eyes o'erfill.
What! hast thou failed to move Great Zeus's will?
Or hast thou met with Juno's angry wrath,
By making too divided Zeus's path?

Cupid.
Mother, the father will not grant my plea
To help two luckless lovers on the earth.
Plead for me, mother, I can naught with him.

Venus (*turning to Zeus*).
Father, why dost refuse our Cupid's plea?
Look how his pretty eyes are filled with tears,
His tender heart is breaking 'neath their woe.
How canst thou bear to see our Cupid so?

Juno (*angrily*).
Thy rascal son has tampered with our lord,
And he deserves the sorrow that he bears;
Nor are his tears for the two lovers flowing,
But for his lot that bars him from his love.
We know your Cupid's wiles, and we have watched him closely,

We are not ignorant where he spends his time.
Do what you will, my lord, but not with our approval
Will you grant Cupid's quest won o'er by tears,
And Cytherea's lovely pleading eyes.

Jupiter.
Cupid, come hither, tell us what thou wilt.

Cupid.
I have already told thee, most High Jove,
'Tis thy great aid and promise of protection.

Jupiter.
Why dost thou come to us, most foolish boy?
Dost thou not see that we cannot assist thee?
We are not kings of Erebus and Hades,
Monarch of death, and double darkness there.

Cupid (*kneeling*).
Great Jove, thy hand is mightier than Pluto's;
And at thy voice, the thunderbolt, he quails;—
And yet art thou more merciful than he,
Thy heart is not so stony and thy ear
Will hear a suppliant's plea.
This do I seek, great Jove,
That if my eloquence should fail to move
(As it well may, failing of moving thine)
The stony heart of Pluto, then I can
Rely on thy almighty hand to help.

Juno.
Cowardly Cupid, darest thou not go
Into dark Pluto's cave unless thou hast
The thunderbolts of Heaven at thy back?

Hurl him to Hades with the thunderbolt;
There let him move
The heart of Pluto with his eloquence.

Jupiter.
Peace, Queen of Heaven, we are our own king!

Juno.
And every queen is king of every king,
Thou never yet hast done a noble deed
That I was not the mover of the king,
Thou never yet was punished but by me!

Jupiter.
Peace, Queen of Heaven, thou wilt outdo our patience!

Juno.
But Jupiter is often ruled by Venus.
If not commanding, then fair eyes will do it.
It is no shame if he be ruled by Venus,
And no doubt he will this instance grant
Her weeping boy his quest.

Jupiter.
We will be ruled by neither. Cupid, go.
We will not strike thee with the thunderbolt,
Nor will we give thee our protection, go—
Go and beseech dark Pluto with thy prayers.
Speak; are we ruled by either?

Venus (to herself).
Yes, by both.
And yet by neither. (*To Cupid*) Cupid, dear, my son,
Hearken, my Cupid, to thy mother's words.
Go not thou to darkest Pluto's cave,

(*Cupid frowns and turns as if to go.*)

But to the garden of Proserpina.
A hooting owl's the only master there,
And sweetest Ceres, child, will grant thy prayer.
Take winged Hermes, bound with sandals light,
To be thy guide to see, in death's dark night.

(*Hermes comes forward, she puts his hand in Cupid's.*)

So, and farewell, dearer to me than sight.

Cupid.
Farewell, dear mother, swiftly will I run!

Hermes.
Fear not, fair Queen, for I will lead thy son.

(*Exeunt to right.*)

(*Curtain.*)

ACT IV

SCENE 1. *Almost absolute darkness. Hades, dark trees standing all about, at the left stairs, in front of which hang dark curtains lined with silver light.*

(*Enter Cupid and Hermes from the stairs.*)

Cupid.

What see you, Hermes, or what do you hear?
Darkness bewilders both mine eye and ear.

Hermes.

Black night surrounds us and about us stand
Sad sentinels of this most dismal land,
Black eucalyptus trees and cypresses
Stretching their tall heads to the unstarred sky.
Far off I hear the moaning spirits cry,
"Mercy upon us, great Proserpina!"

Owl.

Whoot! whoot! whoot! who, who, who, whoooo!

Cupid.

And hoots there not a boding owl near by
That counts a mortal's death with every cry?
Grow there no poppies pale beside the path
That leads to the sad portals of her wrath?

Hermes.

I think they do. My eyes more keenly see.
Poppies of slumber grow beneath this tree,
The shades of Hades all about us are.
And all is only silence, darkness, and the night.

(*Enter Proserpina from right, sowing poppy seeds.*)

Proserpina (*sings*).

Purple poppy, flower of death,
In the earth I bury you,
Even as mortal men are buried
In the earth because of you.
You, the powerful, the mystic,
You can tame the wildest heart,
Still its fever, calm its beating,
Something of new life impart.
You the serf in bondage welcomes,
You the king fears on his throne,
Humbler of the great in power,
Exalter of the poor and lone.

(*Proserpina stops on seeing Hermes. Cupid, however, she does not see.*)

Proserpina.

Stranger, who are you, mortal man or god?
Speak or else leave these paths of mine untrod!

Hermes.

Great gods we are, from high Olympus come
On doleful errand to Proserpina.

Proserpina.
Welcome to my brothers from Olympus high,
Welcome, what word from heaven do you bring?

Hermes.
Hail, greatest Queen, from heaven we bring no word,
On no god's errand do we bend our knee,
But on a deed of mercy do we come,
A deed of mercy for two luckless lovers.
Great Queen Proserpina, so thou beest pleased,
Cupid is here and will speak for himself.

(*Leads forward Cupid, who is blinking and cannot see.*)

Cupid (*kneeling*).
Oh, great Proserpina, before I speak,
Grant I beseech that I see and hear;
For love is blinded here in this dark world
And deafened by the silence that prevails,
And I would see thy face, e'er I begin.

Proserpina.
Cupid, see, (*stage becomes lighter*) hear, (*voices are heard*) and speak, what is your plea?
Speak to Proserpina and fear us not.

Cupid.
Fear it is not that holds my inmost heart,
But it is adoration of thy face.

Proserpina.
Adore us not till we have heard your plea,
Adore us not till we have granted it.

Cupid.

Oh, great Proserpina, if thou hast heard
Of fair Versanta, an unearthly maid
Who lived on earth, then half my cause thou knowest!

Proserpina.

Oh, fair Versanta, most unhappy maid,
Who slew herself, thinking her lover dead!

Cupid.

It is the same Versanta, and if thou hast
Heard of old Sestus, through Versanta's lips
Then all my plea thou knowest, Proserpina,
Grant me to lead Versanta back to earth,
For twenty years have passed since that sad day,
And I have bound my soul by oath that I
Would lead Versanta to her lover's arms.
Oh, grant me, Proserpina, this one request!

Proserpina.

Cupid, Cupid, our heart is sad for thee.
Cupid, we would that we could grant thy plea.
It cannot be, it cannot be, alas!
In death the soul and body separate,
Unburied was this body twenty years,
For twenty years it has corrupted lain,
How can the spirit enter it again?

Cupid.

Is there no power, no hope by which I can
Restore Versanta to her lover's arms?
Alas, she was not buried, had no funeral rite,

But died of deadly nightshade, Hades' fruit,
And all the bending Dryads wept their leaves,
And made a mound above her of their tears
And thus she came below.

Proserpina.

There is one hope.
The river Lethe flows beyond this path,
But it is slow and difficult to reach
To feet untrained to listless Lethe's sands.
As you advance a step your foot recedes,
And never may you reach the end unless
The Fates have willed it so!
If you can find Versanta at the brink,
She will not drink of Lethe's quiet stream;
But sprinkle her garment with Lethean dew,
Without a doubt she may return in spirit
Unto her lover who in spirit lives;—
But if you can not, then without a tear,
Without a murmur or backward glance
Begone!
The Fates have willed it so!

Cupid.

So let it be!
Indeed it is a little hope I hold
For often have I cursed the holy Fates.
Let me not hope, for unto him who hopes,
Destruction comes when he is unprepared.
To him who hopes not what may come, may come,
For he is hopeless, desperate, prepared!
I thank thee, Queen, who heardest my appeal,
And now I go, I go to my ordeal.

(*Exeunt Cupid and Hermes center.*)

Proserpina.

And may the Fates go with thee, noble heart,
And if they go not then, my hope, depart.
Depart, oh, Cupid, then without a sigh,
Depart, oh, sunlight of a happier world,
How grateful to these darkened lids of mine!
Dear as a child is to a childless heart
And sunlight to this sunless house of mine,
Thou must depart, the Fates have willed it so!

(*Re-enter Cupid, Hermes and Versanta.*)

Cupid.

Lethean dews and mists o'ercame me not!
Behold Versanta freed from Pluto's grasp!
Rejoice, Proserpina, rejoice with me.
For death is conquered and the maid is free!

(*Versanta kneels to Proserpina.*)

Proserpina.

Kneel, child of earth, while I absolve your guilt,
While I absolve the death you dealt yourself.
The sleep inducing poppy wand I wave
Above your bended head, forget this grief,
Let it be as a long forgotten dream,
Remembered only in a moment's gleam,
And then past in oblivion onward.
Awake, awake, and when you next do speak,
Let it be tangled woods and streams that hear you!

Cupid.

Farewell, dark Queen, and may we soon behold
Thy blooming footsteps in the upper world!

(*They start to ascend the stairs, Cupid singing.*)

Away, away, to the leaf-laced grove!
We'll fly to freedom and to love!
Up, up we climb through the liquid air!
Up, up to the blooming forest fair,
Away! away! away!

(*They disappear.*)

Proserpina (*watching them still*).
Away, away, to the leaf-laced grove!
Away, away, fair god of love!
And soon indeed shall mortal men
See Proserpina on earth again!
'Tis spring, 'tis spring, 'tis spring!

(*Throws off her purple cloak, and stands robed in white.*)

(*Tableaux.*)

(*Curtain.*)

ACT V

SCENE 7. *Same as Act* 1, *Scene* 3.

(*Versanta lying in the grass as before.*)

(*Enter Dryads and Satyrs dancing.*)

First Dryad.

Merrily, merrily sing the trees,
Merrily, merrily fans the breeze,
For spring is here on every side
And decks the meadows far and wide.

First Satyr.

The flowers bud and the grass springs up,
The bee nestles low in the buttercup,
From the shaded bank sweet perfume rises;
Oh, these are the days that a true lover prizes.
(*They all laugh.*)

Second Dryad.

See, Proserpina has been this way,
As early as the break of day,
For at her feet the flowers rise
Warmed by the sunlight of her eyes.

Second Satyr.

No less do I at thy feet recline
Cheered by the warmth and light of thine,
Be mine, be mine, oh, Dryad, dear,
Ever a faithful heart to cheer!

Third Dryad.
Oh, every year they bloom and die,
And every year the tall trees sigh,
And every year we are locked in our trees
And crave in vain the balmy breeze.

Third Satyr.
Oh, every year does my youth renew,
And every year again I woo,
And every year I woo in vain,
For every year I woo again!

(*They all laugh.*)

(*All Satyrs repeat.*)

And every year we woo in vain
For every year we woo again!

(*Exeunt all to left.*)

(*Enter Proserpina leading Sestus from right. Sestus however, does not see Proserpina.*)

Proserpina.
Versanta, now your hour has come, awake!
Your mystic love is waiting by your side,
Awake, Versanta, maid of Hades' shades, awake!

Versanta (*waking*).
Sleep, is it sleep, and have I slept so long?
Oh, have I dreamt or was that sorrow real?
No, I have slept, the dew hangs on my hair,
And glistens on my bower of grasses tall,
Yes, I have slept and dreamt the strangest dream—

(*Sestus comes nearer. Versanta sees him.*)

Oh, Sestus, love, it was a dream not true.
I dreamt that thou was dead, and I dead, too!

Sestus.
And you have dreamt it? I have dreamt it, too!

Versanta.
'Twas but a dream, my Sestus, but a dream!
We are not dead, but living, Sestus, love,
Life is not ended, it is just begun!

Sestus.
But, oh, 'tis long since I have seen thy face.

(*Kisses her.*)

Versanta.
No, but a single night.

Sestus.
A single night?
No, weeping and sorrow, they have chained me fast,
And many a night, and many a year has past,
All blended in that "single night" of yours.
So for a "single night" we were apart,
Severed in body, and yet close in heart;
For you through Pluto's gates have passed,
And praise be to the god of love that thou
Art safe at last!

Proserpina.
Oh, mystic children, bound in holy love,
Behold Proserpina, the Queen of Spring.

(*They kneel to Proserpina.*)

Oh, mystic children, wake from this strange dream,
Forget it all, 'tis past and shall not be;
Behold the glorious future on before,
'Tis verdant morning and 'tis verdant spring!
'Tis morning of your lives and of the year!
Hearken, I hear the Dryads' voices clear!

(*Enter Satyrs from left, surrounding Cupid and Dryad with garlands, singing.*)

Dryads and Satyrs.
Rejoice, rejoice we have a king at last,
Rejoice, rejoice for Cupid is our king.
Rejoice, rejoice for all our feuds are past,
Let us rejoice then in the verdant spring.

(*Cupid and Dryad kneel at the left of Proserpina while Sestus and Versanta kneel at right, Proserpina holds her hands above their heads. Dryads and Satyrs shower them with roses and dance about them.*)

(*Curtain.*)

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